ensemble

The small brass band plays abruptly. Those who aren't a product of the pattern may stare and whisper- saying to another, "what are they playing?". The baritone sits far left of the third row, at glimpse- his reflection stretched along the golden bell. On nights where the auditorium key light works, the sweat stains a pit while spit bubbles beneath the mouthpiece.

"I've learned to sit with it."

His mother named him Fallou, she had gotten the name from a cab driver one night while on Marietta Street. She had never been to Senegal- or Africa for that matter, all she had ever known circulated between the H.E. Holmes station and back to Glenwood. It wasn't like Atlanta was a hard circle to navigate anyway, the taximan- Ibrahim had proven so easily and matter of fact. He had left Senegal with his family for North America in 2004. After two journalists from *Radio France Internationale* had been reported missing, and Ibrahim's wife had received death threats in the mail- it was necessary. Two others from the same *Le Quotidien* article had been imprisoned for speaking against President Wade, there seemed to be nothing left there for them anymore. He had been staying in Georgia for almost as long as his oldest daughter was alive, yet he had not tried to fully adopt the English language.

"Of course I miss my mother! When Yana was younger, she would hold her and sing *fatou yo* until she would laugh, aiye aiye she would laugh until she clapped!" The man's excitement sombered for just a moment, smiling as he recited the children's song to the soon-to-be-mother.

Fatou yo si di dialano
Fatou yo si di dialano
Fatou yo si di dialano
Boutoumbélé Boutoumbélé
Di dialanooo!

The soon-to-be-mother didn't know the words, so she clasped her hands and smiled. It was that type of smile you do when encountering somebody from childhood that knew your parents. The red-burgundy Volvo approached Lee street with the same crept as a Burmilla moving towards the canned-tuna feed the grandmothers would sit out at night for them.

"To the corner please, that light right there", said the soon-to-be-mother.

Now, her soon-to-be-baby pushing against walls of flesh as if he knew it was time for him to open the door. The bronze bell-colored lady adjusted her Volvo-burgundy spaghetti tank and matching couture velours, as she moved one foot closer to the other preparing to open the door. Mr. Ibrahim, a man slathered in vaseline with open toes in the middle of October swept to the other side as quickly as the Burmilla swept down the apartment blocks, C200, C201.

Though he had long seen his mother, he hadn't forgotten the same manners she'd prepared him with. All true, the same ones that prepared him to run from onslaught. Onslaught upon his career, onslaught upon letters of things we will not say about his wife in the mail, onslaught upon shoddy treatment in Buckhead when the office man declared a ride the same way he'd attempt to declare everything else he encountered. Onslaught upon the goat's neck that he'd remember vividly when searching for something to confide in. He couldn't help but think about it, even though he knew it was for sacrifice. Mr. Ibrahim the taxidriver journalist, he'd known sacrifice all too well. He was tired of sacrifice. He often thought about how funny it was that he now found his neck in the same nook as the sacrificial goat. He balanced (survived, whichever to call it) onslaught well, and for this reason he could be as joyous he'd like in his burgundy Volvo.

"Eh! Sa barke bu ndaw fallou!", said the greasy-faced man.

The soon-to-be-mother's own curiosity (more apparent this time) couldn't be hidden behind a brow raise, so the man exclaimed further.

"Mama! Your own little blessing Fallou!"

He continued to shout on something about how good God was, thanking the water, sun, moon and tree people all in the same breath.

Partially confused by the kindness of the older man, partially by the sudden Wolof- she handed him $15 dollars and headed down Campbellton. Her 95's she'd gotten for Christmas

clicked against the crack pavement, her mother was in a wheelchair yet she still carefully stepped past the crack. Sparing the colonies of black ants below the crack of moss and broken Smirnoff bottles, and sparing herself as well she thought carefully.

About the car ride, the greasy-man who stood confidently beside his Country, and beside his people through his writing, and he still does and- “what was the name of that song he sang?”

“Fataoouu yooo si di diablaaaa”, she sang and sang all the way home.

Usually the men at the gas stations would holler with the might of Shango towards her and she would hurry, but tonight, tonight felt different. She hadn’t even taken a BC powder and her cramps weren’t as bad, but she knew she felt lighter as she sang. So, the brass-colored lady with her soon-to-be-baby coupled up comfortably in an expanding egg with condensed mother milk made her way under streetlights with scarlet undertones. The kind that would let you know from the scarlet your mother wouldn’t be pleased if you weren’t in the house on time.

She sang so loud that the trees reduced their wind words and whispered to another, “what is she singing?”.

Singing and remembering- she really wasn’t the best multitasker. She'd vowed to stop smoking while waiting for her baby to meet her, but all of the pre-adolescent abuse had already fried the parts of her brain where the trauma sat.We don’t speak of that trauma anymore anyway because the words we tether are still always perverted in the media.

So, she sat with it.

The neighborhood-granny, grey and green-eyed Burmilla sat with her.

Everything was always so sudden, people would grow up, get careers, go on and marry and live-, but why was everything always so sudden with her? On nights where the only people awake were construction workers near I-85, corporate men fucking off on others wives, and billionaires sniffing a pretty white on marble until their nostrils closed and they suffocated on matching white sofas because they had no taste. Prettier than any white she’d care to come into contact with for that matter. On nights like these she would talk to God. Some nights she would listen really, really hard! Her eyes would shoot open at the sound of anything in that time, but then again- nobody's awake. So it has to be God right? Either way, she’d relay her thanks to God

(or whoever heard her crying about her wish to take her life) for the baby that made the family look at her crooked-eyed.

Scared for her. Yup.

They didn't have to say it, black folks' faces will tell you everything they feel about it.

By the time she'd given some potato chips to the small cat, wondering if they could have Lay's Sweet Heat- she'd made it down the street.

She kicked her sneakers off at the door, closed and locked it behind her.

Her apartment was small, but it was comforting to have something for herself. Quiet, but it was always quiet, the only thing accompanying the "African Love" inscent and the photographed shelves of the apartment was a baby rottweiler named Kimp. She'd thought it'd be cute for a baby rottweiler to greet her soon-to-be baby in his little baby-boy blue room.

"Ooo! So cute!" she'd usually say, shaking her arms, grasping fists in excitement before going back to cleaning.

There was no "Hey Baby" or greeting kiss at the door, that had been fleeting since before she'd known of a child. She couldn't remember any more of the man than what she'd seen when they'd met. He was strong, a good strong though- he didn't talk too much. It had been three years they spent together- all true, yet it wasn't her fault she'd say to girlfriends.

"He always led on more than what he was, and then gon' leave me. Ain't that some selfish shit?"

Sometimes they'd agree and laugh, other times they didn't know if this was how she grieved with death. He hadn't been gone longer than six months, 2 days and eighteen hours.

Of course she paid attention. This time he said he was gon' do right.

"Bullshit.", as she plopped onto the couch with seats like buckets.

He had never had a real job, only jobs moving loads with Mr. Hies across the street or lil side-gigs that made enough to come back and show his efforts. He would say things like“ look baby, I’m trying-I’m telling you, them cracka motherfuckers ain’ gon ever see me again”. She would smile with folded arms like staring at a mischievous child. Sometimes how childlike he was made her wonder if he’d realized how closely he’d stood to death. It couldn’t have, with a smile and laugh like that- how could you have any worry at all? “How could you still smile as they put the gun to the back of your head?”, she thought. Often she felt guilty that she actually couldn't see it happen, maybe then she could’ve casted her body on the cop as well and died beside him. Maybe then this apartment wouldn’t be so quiet.

He wasn’t out serving that day, just headed to the store and back with her craving snacks- Funyun’s and shrimp noodles, Swishers and a blue Gatorade. She was at work when she’d seen his mama Teresa had called her. Still then, his mother was able to act poised and matter of fact like Ibrahim.

“Nadine. Get down here now. They pulled Jeremiah over by the house and they keep tryna pull their guns on him.”

She didn’t raise her voice, everything else in the background was so loud, so much shouting and she was calm. Teresa’s calm voice always soothed Nadine, it was the same tone that spoke to her when she couldn’t find where Jeremiah had gone at night.

“Them niggas gon be the downfall of him Ma I keep saying it.”, she would say wearing one of his cozy sweatshirts.

“I know baby, all we can do is pray he do right like he-”, Teresa choked up by the aggression in Nadine’s voice.

“That ain’t enough!”, she said, nearly throwing herself over the balcony of the tiny apartment.

“God ain’t enough?”

“N-no that’s not what I me-”

“Then you go out there and get him.YOU save him. I love that boy more than I loves life itself but if it’s up to God then all be it. Neither one of you is out of God’s eyes, so whatever y’all gon’ do for that baby- you best have a better plan than God.”

“Mama.”

“You done did all you can baby. Whatever he’s going to do, that will just be that. It’s not for us to interfere with anymore Dine Dine’, it’s between him and God.”, Teresa said, raising a glass from the second shelf on the wood-stained cabinet.

The phone would go silent..

“You understand me girl?”, once Teresa had found out a baby was on the way- she’d upgraded from “lil girl”.

The nail salon Nadine worked at was two blocks down from the apartment complex and Chevron. She hadn’t gotten a car yet, but she couldn’t wait on the Marta. She didn’t say anything to the older Korean women she could only *sometimes* understand, just ran and ran as far as she could with the two-month baby bump. Her run became instinctual. She was forcing her shoulders forward, nearly tipping to shift body weight. Her feet didn’t want to carry her any more. She was hoping by the time she got there the cops would have left and Jeremiah would take her to get something to drink at the Chevron she was getting ready to pass. She looked at the sky, not because she was trying to reason with God at this moment; but to ask God why it was so hot?

"Stupid question." She thought, trying to keep her mind busy before running around the corner and under the scarlet streetlights that had dimmed their scarlet for daylight.

She saw him, even better she could hear him. Even when he was agitated or serious, he sounded so good and she had to snap herself out of it. There were others down there, the local kids that were getting out of school were about to hop the bus, old ladies sitting outside (this wasn't a new occurrence), and then the men at the Chevron ready to holler like a hit dog. This time all with cameras out, all yelling distinct chants but none Nadine could make out before the blood covered Jeremiah's backseat. Her ears rang, but they rang a bright tone like a trumpet player. The people in the way between her and Jeremiah all of a sudden disappeared. She saw the car but with every stride it got further and further away. She looked at the sky again thinking about those red sodas with Jeremiah, flirting in the grey Impala how they always did- still like highschoolers. She thought about him being there and the faces he'd make watching her give birth, the stupid ass questions he'd asked the nurse, she thought about him kissing the baby-blue walls after a third coat of paint and then making their way to the bedroom in hopes of a soon-to-be-babygirl. She saw him graduate and go back to school again, she saw herself standing beside him as he did what he said he would. She called his name before they shot him, and even then he was still smiling. She caught a glimpse of his pretty teeth and boiler-black eyes that saw everything in her.

Her ears unmuffled, and it was a disgusting sound that you would never hear. Mother Teresa didn't sound like a human then, more like something that you conjure up in a book. Not demonic, but not an angel either, Her screams twisted so many ears that it began to sound like tongue, and then it began to sound like a curse over the officer she had just watched kill her baby

and get brain matter on his blue Gatorade. His favorite flavor, Nadine, had gotten him other ones in the past as part of Christmas baskets but she'd found he'd always have one of those after playing basketball. The Christmas before this summer she'd gotten it all right. The blue raspberry Trolli's with red ends she'd hand picked, the blue Gatorades, she knew everything else like the back of her hand.

She fell to the ground, eyes wide and let off a siren cry that caused everyone who hadn't already been standing there to come outside. The cry commanded like a horn, but everyone knew to stand back. Mother Teresa and Nadine shot by onlookers and down and into the arms of Jeremiah, both lying parallel to his legs inside the vehicle. His eyes were still open with life but that didn't deter nor scare them, Nadine loved when Jeremiah looked at her because he got shy so often, and Mother Teresa knew her son's glance better than anyone else's. He still looked on with "baby look" eyes and the same eyes that always told his mother when he'd make it home, but always forgot when he got to where he was going. When the ambulance actually arrived they'd attempt to remove him from underneath Teresa, Nadine straddled beside his leg kissing his hand, blood on the button-nose he used to kiss before leaving.

By the time they'd actually gotten him to a hospital nothing was a surprise anymore, not the cops and cold blood right beside the house where the Burmilla strays lay, and black children hopped from ledges and into grass piles. His favorite snacks, now in the hand of Nadine, didn't surprise her, the all-to-real reality that "my baby was gone" didn't cause Teresa to scream anymore. For she'd already elated her lungs past what was possible. For that, she now sat with it. That's all she'd care to do for some months, sit. What more was there to do now? My baby had already grown up, tried to get a career, have a kid and was killed right by where he was born.

“What else was there to do?”, she often thought as she washed her hands, bent over the sink scratching a leg with her big toe.

“I’d resigned my life away to this one person and they took him. They took my baby”.

There were other things she would mutter as well but didn’t want the power of mind to overcome her so she tried her best to push those thoughts to the corners where his dirty laundry still sat with his scent.

“Bullshit.”, Ms Teresa said as she got up from the chair in the ER where she had already known in all-too-real reality that her baby was dead. Months later, the laundry still unwashed, yet folded now in the corner, the static from Phyllis Hyman vinyls bounced off the dining table. She replayed the day in her head everyday even after his burial. She couldn't remember him with his face bloated up and mismatch make-up over the gunshot wound, the scarring still showing. She remembered him as she’d last seen him, eyes wide without fear of the cop- almost laughing at the thought of his gatorade bottle being a weapon. Yea, that’s how she remembered her son. Fearless for better or for worse of a world that was made to make everything in all-too-real reality an horror for brass-colored people with the voice frequencies that peered through the piggish nature of those in navy blue. On some days she’d hope the town hall would burn down with every cop in it, on others she imagined Jeremiah getting out and walking away, some days she’d hope to not imagine at all. Three months later, she prepares kneaded baby-blue bibs for the still unnamed soon-to-be-all-too-real baby boy in his still unpainted baby-blue room.

“I’ll just call tomorrow, " a man at work said he was looking for some handyman work around. I think maybe he just got out.”, rubbing Kimp’s paws against the cloth mat welcoming those into the small apartment.

“Well, it’d be best if you get on it and let me know if you need anything now. You know Junior be doing all that painting stuff- I can have him come do it if need be.”, said Ms Teresa as she carefully watched the rott pup stroll across the carpet and loaf the same as he’d seen the Burmillas do.

“It’s okay mama, Junior be doing a different type of painting right? How is school going for him?”

“He say he fine.”

“Same thing he say all the time.”

“Eggggxactly,”, Mother Teresa now reaching across the rug to rub the pot-belly stomach of the rotty pup with half-clean paws.

“How you feel?”said Teresa, redrawing her hand from the pup who was now all-too excited to roll about on the rug by himself.

“About?”

“Good question.”, Teresa paused for a moment as she looked at Nadine- still in the oversized cozy sweaters.

“Well, I guess about everything. I know it’s broad”

“Scared. Unsure. Confiden- slightly. Sad. I don’t know anymore”

“ I was finna say how you unsure and confident baby”, Mother Teresa said with a laugh so painless you’d forget anybody was sulking.

“Why keep 'em’?”

Nadine was shocked but only momentarily she'd forgotten that older black folk had the same matter of fact sense that all Africans had when it came to interacting with their children, so she replied.

" This was his last attempt at trying to do something right." Dine Dine replied with that same matter of fact sense holding her stomach.

"Before all this, me and him were working on a plan for real mama. We'd been looking at places near the coast in Savannah because he'd heard from riding round with Mr. Hies that rent was cheaper down there. Cops weren't so bad as in the city, he could still make his lil' money but he would get a skill. He said he wanted to be an electrician, and be able to teach him how to fix stuff around the house. Maybe start a son and pop thing and they'd go places how he wanted. I would be here with my nail business and every so often we'd go on vacations down to the water since we'd be closer. He wanted to teach him bout' rap music, older rap music-like when they used to use other songs to create new ones."

"Sampling."

"Yeah that's what he called it- sampling, he would play Eye Know by De La when he picked me up from the plaza and I was so embarrassed by it."

"Ima sing this to him when he get here baby!" he'd say.

"We had a plan for real mama, a real plan mama.", Nadine said now, shaking from the dream that had been so close and then taken away.

"I know baby, I know- you still got that dream?" said Teresa, holding Nadine now like her own. She was her own. Maybe the only thing she had now.

"Mhm..", Dine nodded in the breast of Teresa.

“Well listen here- you hold on to that-y’hear? Don’t go giving in from a broken heart or giving up on yourself, we gotta make sure you here for that baby na don’t we?”

Nadine didn’t respond.

“If you can’t do anything else, that;s what I’m here for. Don’t go thinking you’re here by yourself, whatever you need - and I mean it can be to just come wipe yo’ ass-”

“Mamaa-”

“Shut it, whatever it is you got all of us. Even Junior even though he act like his phone broken.”

“Yes ma’am.”, Ms Teresa kissed Nadine on the head with the same softness Jeremiah would and they went back to cleaning the soon-to-be baby room.

Fallou. She named him Fallou. She traced the linings of the bucket-seat couch until the marks on it would mimic her own across her stomach, her tree root stomach. Like the blessing, aiye aiye! She named her little blessing Fallou. After all, it had only been a few months before the soon-to-be-baby would become the all-too-real baby with an all-too-real loving mommy with a loving ghost daddy that had to up and leave just like that and, “ain’t that some shit?” She’d thought of names before, none that really stuck to her like that one did. A bunch of names jumbled, beginning with a J and ending with an “-an” sound on the end of them. Jordans, Jaydens, Jaidens and Jaidyns- because there weren't enough ways to spell that one. On occasion she would throw in a ‘Josiah’ or Jeremiah Jr. to entertain some thought of keeping him alive in the little soon-to-be-here baby boy. He would have his eyes and his mouth, but share Dine Dine’s little button-nose, she’d wiped away the blood since- every now and then some smell of poultry always made her scream again though. This was the reason she didn’t like to be in the kitchen for

events that caused family to come and ask “who all gon’ be there?” She’d much rather sit in the back of Teresa’s apartment tracing the wall with a finger while Jeremiah’s little cousin would rattle off something about her new Stanley cup or how track had been going this year.

“Four by four hundred?”, said Nadine with dainty fingers that caressed the walls of Jeremiah’s room the same way he’d caressed hers. She had gotten so good at making it seem like she was interested in something (took too much effort and made her sleepy). Honestly, she’d begun to confuse herself, and sooner or later she would talk more than Naija.

“Yup, I’m trying to build my core up before senior year starts. Coach said at least this way I can start getting ready for college camps and expos.”, said Naija, now curled up on the side of Jeremiah’s bed in a corner that comforted her back after workouts.

“Since when have you been long-distance?”Nadine took her hand away from the wall and placed it below the “one more month to go” baby bump that had grown all the way from the little bump and into a tree stump across Dine Dine’s belly. Her face was beginning to bloat more now than before, perhaps a sign from the baby, perhaps a sign to relax herself and at least try breathing. Two months prior she’d blown out the candles for Jeremiah’s birthday this year, her face still bronze- now with red undertones. She mimicked a blowfish, or maybe a baritone player right before the spit slipped underneath the Yamaha mouthpiece.

“I’ve been running a long time! I’ve done long distance beforeeee!”said Naija, now curling against Nadine- hot fry dust still snowing from her fingertips. She would often sprinkle her fingers together like a fairy, or how Jeremiah would right before breaking down a nug and make sure to rub them on Nadine. They knew how much she didn’t like it, but it was still their

special way of saying “I love you enough to get on your last nerves”. Another thing, why did teenagers always stretch their words like that?

“Beforeeeeeeee. like who even came up with that shit anyway? She wondered if it made words more believable, easier to digest maybe?”Nadine couldn’t recall trying it herself. Maybe she did once or twice only with Jeremiah, after all he was the only person who made her comfortable enough to revert back to speaking like a little girl. Everyone else got the husk and shellac gold earrings that swayed the same way her ass did, and did I mention the men would holler like dogs? Wild dogs, that’s what Ms. Teresa called them.

“Good for nothings, just always lookin’ to bother something, and then lookin just to look”, they were good for reassurance but not much more. Their compliments didn’t offer the same charm as Jeremiah’s, of course she was glad that others saw her as attractive or maybe as a good toy in their own image. Yet, “damn” and “ay” could only reach the ears so far. They didn’t reach her fallopian, or even the back of her ears and neck, nowhere near the places that he’d seen, touched or licked. That was all his. That quiet voice she’d had trouble hearing when they first met, saying “What? Huh?” just to be able to melt again once he spoke. She missed it. All of it, and all of him. Even the parts that made her question herself when she spoke to him and his childish-tone felt immature and like waste. The one-month-to-go brass woman wanted to melt again, just one more time. Rub him one more time, and then he would infantilize and suck sap from the root. One more time, that’s all.

“I’ve been running too Nai”, said Nadine as she smoothed the hot fry dust into the seams of her light blue denim- she’d grown disgusted with navy.

Naija was confused and her face told before her mouth, so it was no reason to ask- it was inherited.

"I'd been running so long I'd done forgot which direction I was supposed to be heading."

Naija looked on attentively, her curious eyes tracing back and forth between the now empty chip bag and the pile where his dirty laundry once sat, now a beautiful memoriam of him in all of his childlike, strong- good type of strong nature. It was the only picture that had been taken since he'd been at home. It wasn't too far from where they killed him, remember- Atlanta ain't nothing but one big circle. The photo was a selfie of Jeremiah and Nadine that he'd asked her to take while they sat in the Bruster's parking lot. A spliff with a bad ratio in one hand, cookie cream cones smeared against polished knuckles and freckled shaving bumps in the other hand. The two of them, with larger smiles than the Kool-Aid man. She could remember everything about that photo- so perfect, even though smoking had taken a chunk of her memory. It never took those things. How could it? For somebody that smiled that carelessly to be taken from her memory would be another hell in itself that she thought maybe she couldn't sit with. The boxy-static from the record-player that once echoed Hyman's sentiments of nobody being capable of loving you more now beatboxed, sometimes it'd spit profusely like a camel and drinks would fall atop the spinning Slum Village record.

"Hurry up and grab that drink dammit!", there were so many brass-colored people packed inside Ms Teresa's apartment- it was impossible to detect a singular voice in the commotion. The men laughed, choked up like Edelblock carburetors and cammed motors on the Chevy posters Jeremiah would hang on his door. Smoke guzzled from beneath red cups, what was in it? Enough to power a tank. Then, one more, "*wuusssssp"*- older men were always so dramatic when they

inhaled- as if they got higher. The women sat in pose, almost staged like the large-format six-by-seven Deana Lawson photographs Junior had shown Nadine and Jeremiah even though they'd never cared about photos. Glass cups of wine- enough of it to fill a whole tank and maybe even filter the dirt and Mayor out in Flint. They were larger than any Nadine had ever seen for a gathering for a 'bout-dat-time' little brass baby. All the cousins went for walks, the kind that after returning- you laughed like the cammed-up uncles and Edelbrock grandfathers. Nadine stayed of course, she knew to wait until her baby had gotten to meet her. The scent of the house made folks sleepy, they didn't know whether to eat, sleep or just lie down on the floor and say what came to mind. The further you reached, past the refrigerator door, to puddings or muffins that sat cordial in Gulla-crafted baskets with the faint blue tartan-cloth rags underneath. Faint! There were no haints near this little apartment, only the loving ghost papa who ate blue raspberry Trolli's while sitting criss-crossed from Nadine on the ruffled-orange living room rug. Living-room..that was always funny too to Nadine. The people that occupied these spaces always felt as if they were two steps from life, two from death. The small picture-frames occupied those watching over the little living room way beyond that black-vaccum called space. Nobody suffered from ebullism, because there was no worry of coming down. They could stay suspended there for as long as they'd want. And just that they did. There was no "eternal-suffering", Earth had already been enough. The thought of hell had played the same tricks as those that sat on stoops waiting for the mule, later maybe some acres- later some more waiting, waiting. Those that died off and came back to the little living room would tell you that. Oxygen wasn't tainted by the titanium plants or by the tobacco that clogged his lungs since his youth, so the laugh was more boisterous and cheerful this time. She couldn't hear his laugh, but she thought about a

“living-room” again and couldn’t help but laugh. That made him laugh, they laughed together. The physical, and spirit sitting across one another made skin sound like sex- this was enough they’d decide.

Those thirty-four minutes felt like eternity. The cervix dilated, the nurses ran side by side like Looney-Tunes, careful not to trip. Dine Dine didn’t like the heat of lumens on her, so they dimmed them once (pretending twice). Hospital rooms often felt like interrogation for brass-colored people that played their interlaced duos, making little brass babies that would spit bubbles beneath the mouthpiece.

Count for what? This my first time like it’s yours. Everything was always so sudden anyway.

Nadine always thought she knew everything, that’s what Jeremiah admired most about her. As a person as unsure of himself as mirrored in his reflection of the bell of the world, she offered him focus. Looking at her, knowing everything (and the forehead to prove it) made him feel like he knew himself. Even if just for a split second.

Even when it meant for her having a head coming out of you and telling the nurse to shut the fuck up.

“Camannnnnn come onnnnnnn- like girl shut uppp”, she was doing it and she didn’t even notice.

While mocking the nurse that reminded her of Lois Griffin, she was stretching her words to Ms. Teresa, to Junior in the back (still with a camera and headphones in hand), her father’s side which hadn’t held her since a child. To the Korean women in the shop who’d heard of what happened but remained in the shop-possibly operating more efficiently without Dine Dine

bringing them new drama every day. To the family who'd said they "wouldn't miss it for the world!", but missed it anyway because that's what family does sometimes. To Jeremiah who'd moved corner to corner, hovered over the bed, and even gave the i'm-here-now baby a "welcome back" noogie on his head that hadn't yet been formed by grandma.

"Hay Fallouuuuuuu", said Naija from a distant chair, her Stanley covering her broken acrylic.

The little, brass i'm-here-now-mommy's baby took a deep sigh before letting out a cry louder than the contorting trumpets of before to let Naija know he was tired of her shit already.

The whole room bellowed their horns, playing as an ensemble now to welcome new baby Fallou, aiye aiye! Even Jeremiah's silent giggles of before had transformed the side of the room where the fluids sat, knocking them on the ground. In the process causing everyone to turn for a moment. Then smiling, one by one. Naija first, Junior smart-ass next, Mother Teresa, Grandma, Dine's uncles and grandfather. Nadine, encouraged by the reflections in the bells around her, played a chord that made her heart giggle and then cry. This time a cry of assuring nature. Her tears came down so matter of fact she was reminded of Ibrahim and his family. Her tears reassured her she knew what's right. Like always. So in this moment, the whole room understood and they sat with it. Chattering two moons and some stars away.